Community Participation Strategies

Section Two

Community Participation Strategies

WHY PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT

The Housing Element is one of the most important parts of a community's General Plan. It has a significant affect on land use decision-making, neighborhood design, and quality of life, as well as on housing availability, quality, and affordability. It also directly affects a wide range of community members whose special housing needs are addressed through Housing Element policies and programs.

As Bay Area communities feel increasingly "built out" and the affordability crisis deepens, the challenge of meeting community housing needs has become increasingly difficult. Residents, who feel that their community is already over-built or who fear that continued growth will have significant adverse impacts on community livability, are understandably concerned about a planning process that seeks to accommodate more growth in their community.

As pointed out in the introduction to this document, previous land use decisions that sought to discourage local residential development have had less than desirable effects at both the local and regional levels: urban sprawl and loss of open space, tremendous housing/jobs imbalance, unbearable traffic, and housing prices that make the Bay Area one of the least affordable places in the country. Saying "no" to housing will not solve our problems; it will only make them worse.

Blueprint 2001 seeks to provide a toolkit of strategies for helping the Bay Area to grow smart—providing opportunities for new housing development that fits in with existing neighborhoods, responds to local housing needs, and enhances community quality of life.

However, none of the tools, strategies, or programs presented in this document will be of use if local residents and stakeholders do not understand, appreciate, and support their implementation.

To build support for local housing solutions, community participation needs to be at the very core of the Housing Element process. It is "where the rubber meets the road." In fact, a participatory program of education, input, dialog, and consensus-building can be one of the key strategies for responding to community housing needs. By engaging community residents in a frank discussion of local housing issues and needs, the Housing Element can:

■   Develop a greater appreciation among local residents for the depth and breadth of housing needs in their community.

■   Counter stereotypes about "affordable housing" and its potential benefits and impacts.

■   Introduce concepts such as "workforce housing" and the interrelationship between jobs and housing.

■   Explore ways that affordable housing is part of the solution to traffic, quality of life, and open space issues.

■   Focus attention on design and management issues (rather than density and income) that often make the most difference in the long-term viability and acceptability of affordable housing.

■   Establish an overall framework for land use and development decisions that reflects community values and priorities, thereby facilitating subsequent project-specific review and approval.

■   Build a foundation for other community planning initiatives related to smart growth and sustainability.

■   Provide a positive experience in constructive community engagement with benefits that far outlast the Housing Element process itself.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE HOUSING ELEMENT PROCESS

State Law Requirements

State law requires that local governments "make a diligent effort to achieve public participation of all economic segments of the community…" in the process of preparing the Housing Element (§65583(c)(6)(B)).

This means that jurisdictions must do more than merely hold the public hearings required before adoption of a general plan amendment. At a minimum, the process of preparing a Housing Element should provide an opportunity for residents and stakeholders to give input prior to development of the Draft Element. It should also ensure that residents have access to all of the background data and analyses prepared as part of the process, as well as any interim strategy documents or other reports.

A key point in the State code section regards the participation "of all economic segments of the community." Since many of the policies and programs in the Housing Element respond to the needs of lower income households, they should be considered a key group for the participation program. Other special needs groups (e.g., people with disabilities, farmworkers, seniors, homeless people, etc.) should also be considered, and efforts made to encourage and enable their participation.

Many jurisdictions respond to the State requirements by forming an "advisory committee" or "steering committee" which meets regularly during the course of the Housing Element process to review findings, give input on key recommendations, and (sometimes) "sign off" on the Draft Housing Element before it goes to the Planning Commission and/or City Council or Board of Supervisors. It is important that these groups include representatives of lower income households and special needs groups as well as housing advocates, developers, business groups, and the community-at-large.

Ideally, the participation program should also provide opportunities for more widespread participation, as described in this section. Not only does this respond to the State requirement in a more complete fashion, but it also carries a number of significant benefits for the Housing Element and its implementation.

Participation Principles

At the core of any successful Housing Element is an effective program of community participation that strives to achieve the following participation principles:

■ **Provide Accessible, Usable Information** so that all residents and stakeholders have a clear understanding of the key issues, alternatives, and potential trade-offs.

■ **Learn from Each Other**, recognizing that the process of "education" goes both ways: community leaders and housing professionals need to listen to and appreciate the concerns and priorities of community residents, while residents need to listen to and appreciate the housing needs and challenges facing their community.

■ **Focus on the Facts** so that decisions are based on reality rather than perception. The more that participants can understand and agree upon what the real needs, resources and constraints are in the community, the more likely they are to agree on potential strategies to address them.

■ **Define Key Strategies** to provide an overall framework for the Housing Element's policies and programs. If participants can agree on "the big picture" for responding to housing needs, the more likely that they will be able to work out acceptable resolutions on the more detailed issues.

■ **Encourage and Enable Widespread Participation** that is meaningful, efficient, and effective. Potential obstacles to participation need to be reduced or removed (e.g., time and location of meetings language,

issues, etc.), and participation formats need to provide an opportunity for everyone to participate in a manner that works. Decisions should not be left only to those who can stay the latest or speak the loudest.

■ **Facilitate Dialog** so that participation becomes more than just "having your say," but also includes "listening to others have their say" and seeking out common ground and potential solutions. A skilled facilitator with appropriate sensibilities is essential, helping all participants to keep an open mind and to develop strategies that are in the best interest of the community as a whole.

■ **Respond to Input** to ensure a complete "feedback loop" (*see page 2-8*), so that participants know that they have been heard and that their input has been given due consideration.

■ **Build Consensus**, understanding that not everyone will completely agree on everything. Identify areas of agreement, acknowledging the (usually significant) areas of "common ground" among participants, and then focus on developing potential resolutions to areas of disagreement.

■ **Promote Transparency** so that even if people disagree with the outcome of the process, they understand how it was reached and the reasons behind the decisions made. The documentation of the process should be clear and complete to provide full understanding of the decisions made.

■ **Follow-Through on Commitments** made through the Housing Element process, and establish mechanisms for ongoing participation in the implementation process. Recognize that the process of community engagement and participation is ongoing and an essential component of good governance.

Designing the Process

A broad-based program of public information and participation needs to ensure efficient and meaningful opportunities for public review, input, and discussion. It also needs to be closely linked with the technical work activities and key decision making points in the Housing Element process. Data collection and analysis needs to both inform the participation process and be informed by it.

The basic rule of thumb is that the sooner participation begins and the broader it is, the better. But at the same time, resource limitations must be recognized and the value of an efficient process must be appreciated. Endless meetings that lead nowhere are of no use to anyone and can be a considerable drain on project resources and community patience.

The *Housing Element Process* is discussed on *page 1-2*, including a process graphic illustrating a suggested sequence of steps and activities leading to adoption and implementation of an updated Housing Element. This provides the process framework for designing a participation program that integrates public information and participation tasks into the overall project Work Program.

Following is a summary of key participation activities and considerations for each phase of the work effort.

Project Start-Up

■ **Plan the Participation Program.** Prepare a detailed public information and participation strategy as part of the overall Work Program, including the following:

- Link the sequence of participation activities to other project activities.

- Provide a range of participation opportunities to encourage involvement from key stakeholder groups as well as the general public.

- Ensure that appropriate levels of staffing and other resources are allocated to the participation program.

■ **Initiate Community Information Activities.** Initiate a public communication effort to make the community aware of the update; provide an overview of its goals, activities, and schedule; and highlight

opportunities for citizen input and review. To the extent possible, announce the dates and locations for key public meetings and participation activities. Methods for getting out public information might include press releases, public service announcements, a project newsletter, and/or paid announcements in the local paper. A special effort should be made to identify, make contact, and involve groups that represent people with special housing needs, such as farmworkers, seniors, homeless people and people with disabilities. The services of a translator may be necessary for any or all of these activities

■ **Define Roles and Select Key Participants.** There are a number of individuals and groups that may play a key role in the Housing Element process (*see Defining Roles and Responsibilities on page 2-9*). If the participation program calls for the formation of a project steering committee, technical advisory committee, or similar group, then efforts should get underway immediately to define, select, and notify potential participants. Whether or not a committee is being formed, time should be devoted to identifying key stakeholder groups and community liaisons (*see sidebar below*). This can serve as the basis for developing an initial project mailing list (*see page 2-15*).

Identifying Stakeholders

It is important to ensure that all of the groups who will be affected by the Housing Element's policies and programs are included in the update process. Following is a list of County Coordinators for the Bay Area who are working with the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California (NPH) to respond to affordable housing issues in their counties. They can provide a good starting point for identifying key stakeholder groups in your area. Additional contacts and resources can be found in Appendix D.

Alameda County - Sean Heron, East Bay Housing Organizations (Oakland), 510-893-5611

Contra Costa County - Merlin Wedepohl, Association of Homeless and Housing Service Providers (Concord), 925-827-3598

Marin County - Betty Pagett, Marin Housing Council (San Rafael), 415-258-1800

Napa County - Sue Dee Shenk, Napa Valley Nonprofit Housing Coalition (Napa), 707-253-6202

San Mateo County - Marsha Rea, Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County (Redwood City), 650-599-9144

San Francisco County - Rene Cazenave, San Francisco Council of Community Housing Organizations, 415-863-6566

Santa Clara County - Kristie Scannell, Santa Clara County Collaborative on Affordable Housing and Homeless Issues (San Jose), 408-283-2204

Solano County - Contact Tim Iglesias at NPH, 415-989-8160

Sonoma County - Tula Jaffe, Burbank Housing Development Corporation (Sebastopol), 707-823-1296

General - Tim Iglesias, Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California (NPH), 415-989-8160.

Strategic Directions

■ **Explore Community Perceptions Regarding Housing Issues and Needs.** The starting point for the public participation effort should be activities that are focused on listening to the community's concerns and perceptions regarding housing issues and needs. While basic background information may be provided at these initial meetings, the focus should be on community input, not staff presentations. Types of participation activities that might be appropriate include stakeholder interviews, a community survey or questionnaire, community workshop, town meeting, and/or outreach to special needs groups.
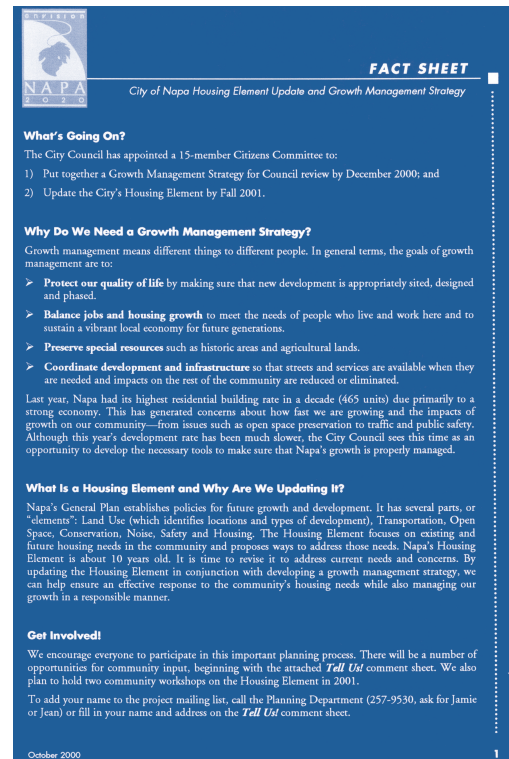
It might also be helpful to conduct a community housing tour to look at recent affordable housing developments in the local area and to develop a better understanding of issues such as density, design, affordability, and ongoing management. Tours can also explore possible housing opportunity sites, including areas of possible reuse/rezoning, redevelopment, and/or mixed-use.

■ **Package and Distribute Background Information and Preliminary Analysis Results.** Basic background information on community housing needs, conditions, and trends should be compiled, analyzed, and packaged in a manner that can be easily understood by community residents. One page fact sheets can provide a quick overview of key findings or background information on key issues, with more detailed information provided in report documents. Information can be distributed at public meetings, through key stakeholder groups, in a community newspaper or newsletter, and/or on the jurisdiction's website. Ensure that summaries and descriptions of policies and programs are presented in clear, non-technical language that is easily understood by the general public.

■ **Define Community Goals and Priorities for Housing.** Building on the initial community input activities and the initial analysis of community housing needs and trends, facilitate a dialog to define community goals and priorities for housing. This can be done through a visioning process, in which residents describe the type of community they want to be in the future, and the types of housing choices and opportunities they see as part of that future, or through a more traditional goal-setting process. Regardless of the approach used, attention should be given to considering how community goals and priorities for housing relate to goals and priorities for other issues, ensuring consistency with other elements of the General Plan.

Assure that goals for the Housing Element respond to state requirements. (*See Defining Goals, Policies, Programs and Objectives, beginning on page 1-36*) Most importantly, try to cast the net of participation as wide as possible at this point in the process so that all of the key stakeholder groups have an opportunity to help define the Element's goals and priorities. To this end, encourage key stakeholder groups to either attend general community workshops or to host workshops of their own to get input from their constituents.

Policies, Programs, and Objectives

■ **Package and Distribute Information on Potential Programs and Strategies.** Once goals and priorities have been defined and agreed to, consider a range of alternative strategies for achieving them. The Directory of Programs and Strategies (*Section Three*) and the Directory of Financial Resources (*Section Four*) provide a good starting point, as do the programs and strategies in the existing Housing Element. Any successful programs and strategies should be continued. Information from *Blueprint 2001* can be photocopied and distributed to help foster community dialog about possible housing solutions that respond to local needs.

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■ **Evaluate and Select a Set of Programs and Strategies, and Develop Preliminary Policies, Programs, and Objectives.** Engage key stakeholder groups, decision makers, and other members of the community in considering, evaluating, and selecting a set of programs and strategies that best respond to local needs and to the agreed-upon goals and priorities. Develop preliminary policies, programs, and quantified objectives for community review and input prior to finalizing the Draft Housing Element. This will help focus review of the Draft Element on refinement of the agreed upon policies and programs rather than on possible reworking of its basic approach or assumptions. Similarly, discussions with State of California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) regarding the preliminary draft of goals, policies, and programs can help ensure that the Draft Element responds to State concerns as well.

Element Review and Adoption

■ **Prepare, Summarize, and Distribute the Draft Housing Element.** Prepare the Draft Housing Element, including with it a brief one- to two-page summary of its key findings, strategies, and programs to provide an overview for members of the public that may not have the time to review the entire document. Make the document available via the web as well as in locations that are easily accessible to the public, including places such as the public library, local government offices, community centers, senior centers, school offices, or even local coffee houses. Send a press release regarding release of the Draft Housing Element to local media contacts, and copies of the document summary to key stakeholder groups.

■ **Conduct Review and Discussion Sessions.** Conduct review and discussion sessions in a community workshop format that allows for more interactive dialog than is typically possible in a formal public hearing. These sessions can also be used to meet public participation requirements for the environmental review process, if required. Ideally, feedback from HCD can be incorporated into these sessions so that any necessary modifications to the draft can be considered and discussed. As before, encourage key stakeholder groups to either attend general community workshops or to host their own workshops to get input from their constituents.

■ **Respond to Comments.** Consider and respond to comments received in the review and discussion sessions, identifying any recommended modifications to the Draft Housing Element document as a result.

■ **Conduct Public Hearings.** The final step in the participation process is formal public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council (or Board of Supervisors, for counties) to review and adopt the updated Housing Element. If the prior participation process was successful, the public hearings will largely be a formality leading to adoption of the Draft Element with few, if any, substantive modifications.

Implementation

■ **Support Ongoing Participation.** An extensive public participation program can lay the groundwork for actual implementation of the adopted policies and programs. A project steering committee can transition into an implementation committee to oversee and monitor community housing needs and achievements. The project mailing list should be maintained and regularly updated to ensure that interested members of the community are kept informed about housing issues as they arise. This can be particularly important if future "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) sentiments arise around a particular housing development or issue.

■ **Provide Regular Reports and Feedback Opportunities.** Begin laying the groundwork for the next Housing Element update by establishing an effective monitoring system, providing regular reports on community housing needs and achievements, tracking progress towards meeting quantified objectives, and providing regular evaluation of each Housing Element program. Establish clear measures of success or "indicators" that can be used to track progress over time and ensure accountability. Annual evaluations should provide an opportunity for community review and input, giving particular attention to evaluation comments from residents who have been served or affected by a particular program.

■ **Demonstrate a Commitment of Meeting Housing Needs.** Use the adopted Housing Element as a strategic planning tool to raise awareness regarding housing needs and confirm the community's commitment to meeting those needs. Follow through on this commitment by establishing spending and action priorities on an annual basis and ensuring accountability for actions taken (or not taken) by all of the stakeholders involved.

The Feedback Loop

Community participation is an iterative process of ongoing dialog between members of the public, key stakeholder groups, technical professionals, and local decision makers. It is not something that can happen effectively in a single meeting, particularly in a formal public hearing, where each person has an allotted time to present their opinion, and there is no opportunity for meaningful dialog and consensus building between stakeholders.

The diagram below illustrates how a public participation feedback loop could be structured for each phase of the Housing Element Work Program. The exact sequence of steps may differ for each phase (e. g., gather community input before undertaking data collection) and the steps do not necessarily need to be sequential (e. g., community outreach and data collection could occur simultaneously).

Keep in mind:

Community participation happens throughout the process, not just once.

There should be at least one opportunity for community input in each phase.

Community participation is both bottom-up and top-down: community input needs to inform technical analysis and decision making, and be informed by it.

Community participation is the focus of the Housing Element process, not something that happens "on the side."

A single community meeting or workshop requires considerable preparation as well as follow-up — information feeds into it, and flows out of it.

Decision makers need to be kept in the loop throughout the process.

Movement towards agreement on key issues is strengthened through each iteration, which also builds political support for implementation.

Proceed to Next Phase

Review by Decision-Makers for Policy Feedback and Direction

Data Collection and Analysis (technical input)

Community Discussion and Feedback (workshops, meetings, surveys, etc.)

Preparation of Background Material (fact sheets, reports)

Community Outreach to Encourage Participation (notices, flyers, press releases, etc.)

Review by Technical Advisory Group (departments, agencies, experts)

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Review of Goals, Strategies, Policies, and Programs

Defining Roles and Responsibilities

An effective participation program provides a variety of participation activities to facilitate the involvement of various stakeholder groups as well as the general public.

The table below provides an overview of some of the key sources of input during the Housing Element process, including elected and appointed officials, stakeholder representatives, community residents and technical staff from the local jurisdiction as well as other agencies and jurisdictions, housing experts, and consultants. The table describes each of these input sources, identifying who is represented in each group, what their typical role is in the process, and their usual decision making or operating procedures.

This table can be customized and expanded for your local Housing Element process to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each group that will be involved. It can then be used to help ensure that the members of each group understand their roles and responsibilities and are aware of how they and others fit into the overall process.

Title:	City Council or Board of Supervisors	Planning Commission	Ad Hoc Citizen Committee	Community Workshops and Outreach	Technical Workshop	Technical Advisory Group (TAG)	Staff Level Input from Other Depts/ Agencies	Planning Department Staff and Consultants
Membership:	City Council or Board of Supervisors	Planning Commission	Invited Representatives of Key Stakeholder Groups	Open to all Citizens and Interest Groups	Representatives of Other Cities, County, Other Agencies, and Housing Experts	Planning, Housing Authority, Redevelopment, City Attorney or Counsel, etc.	Staff of Various Departments and Agencies	Director of Planning, Project Manager, Other Staff, and Consultants
Role:	Direct Policy and Make Final Decisions	Recommend Policy Direction	Provide Input and Build Consensus on Strategic Policy Directions	Provide Opportunity for Public Input	Provide Input on Technical Issues and Strategies	Provide Advice on Process and Technical Issues	Review Products and Technical Input	Prepare Draft Products and Provide Administrative Support
Decision-Making/ Operating Procedures:	Majority	Majority	Consensus When Possible; Summary or Pros/ Cons on Disputed Issues	Discussion and Comment	Discussion and Comment	Discussion and Comment	Data and Input	Support Staff to Council and Commission; Facilitate Involvement from the Public, Other Departments, and Agencies

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Roles and Responsibilities

Engaging Decision Makers

It is important that the ultimate decision makers—councilmembers or supervisors and/or planning commissioners— be kept "in the loop" throughout the Housing Element process. This can be done in a variety of ways: from regular check-ins, to membership on the project steering committee, to involvement in study sessions or council-sponsored workshops. Whatever method is used, it is critical that decision makers understand the issues, needs, and community sentiments on which the Draft Housing Element is based, and that they support its basic goals and priorities. This may require special sessions with decision makers early in the process to present findings on housing issues and needs, review potential strategies, and formulate and approve key policy directions.

Providing Useful Information

Successful participation requires that all participants have access to accurate and understandable information regarding current housing conditions, past experiences, projected trends, and potential alternatives. Such information must be developed through objective analysis and presented in a manner that can be quickly and easily understood by the general public. It is possible that translation services will be necessary to include all participants. Technical data and analysis should both inform and respond to the public participation process, providing data and other information in response to the issues and perceptions raised in community discussions.

Keep in mind that most participants will have limited time to devote to the process. Information must be concise and targeted. Executive summaries and fact sheets can provide a quick overview of key points and references to other documents or websites can provide more detailed information.

Planning and Holding Successful Meetings

Successful participation is the result of successful meetings. Whether it is a committee meeting, a community workshop, or a council study session, meetings need to be properly planned, facilitated, and recorded. The people who organize the meeting need to be respectful of other people's time and commitments, and need to make the most of the time together. The meeting may need to include a translator.

Countering Myths and Misperceptions

Too often, decisions related to local housing and land use are based on stereotypes, myths, and misperceptions, rather than facts. Members of the public or even decision makers may make statements such as "high density housing leads to high crime" or "affordable housing developments lower property values" without ever substantiating these statements with facts. An effective participation process, informed by reliable data, can help counter such myths and misperceptions.

■ **Involve People Who Know the Facts.** Include people on the steering committee, in community workshops, and in other participation forums who understand housing issues and related issues, can provide the facts, and can serve as advocates for people who are typically not represented in the decision making process. They can be important participants in community discussions, can help organize tours of local housing developments, and/or can make presentations about the housing needs and issues of low-income households and special needs groups. Include housing experts as well as people with other information, such as police officers regarding the issue of crime and affordable housing or traffic engineers regarding traffic and parking.

■ **Provide Reliable, Accessible Information.** Do not allow myths and misperceptions to be the basis for decision making. Provide facts in an easy to understand format. This helps people to not only understand "the numbers," but also what they mean. For example, translate "levels of affordability" into actual rents and monthly housing payments, and compare those payments to the average monthly income of local teachers, retail clerks, police officers, and other members of the local workforce.

■ **Give "Affordable Housing" a Human Face.** Everyone has their own idea of what "affordable housing" means, and associated stereotypes. Help people understand the definition of affordable housing, and what it means in terms of local housing opportunities and people's lives. Conduct a tour of affordable housing developments, show videos, and provide literature about what the developments are like. Define who the residents are and encourage their participation in the process so that they can tell their stories and help people understand that real lives are affected by affordable housing.

Following are some tips for ensuring efficient and effective public meetings.

Preparing for the Meeting

Be clear about the meeting's purpose, agenda, and expected outcomes. Do not have a meeting unless you need to and are prepared for it.

■ **Plan the Agenda.** The agenda is critical for a successful meeting. It sets forth the purpose of the meeting, the schedule of activities, and the objectives or expected outcomes. It represents a form of group contract—what the group agrees to work on together for the duration of the meeting. As a result, one of the first items on any agenda should be a review of the agenda with the meeting participants, and an opportunity to make any modifications that are necessary.

   The printed agenda should be sent to participants ahead of time if possible. It should provide sufficient detail so that each of its activities is clear, identify the approximate time allocated to each activity and clearly define the expected outcomes. It should also include the meeting's location, date, time, and a contact name and telephone number.

■ **Locate an Appropriate Meeting Room.** Find a meeting room that will successfully accommodate the planned activities. It should be centrally located, accessible by public transit, and have adequate and convenient parking available. The room needs to be accessible for people with disabilities and have accessible restrooms. Depending on the meeting topic, it may also be important that the meeting be held in what is perceived as a "neutral" location.

   The meeting room itself must be large enough to accommodate the number of expected participants as well as the activities that are planned. Will the room size and layout work acoustically? Is there room to break into small groups? Can chairs and tables be moved? Is there enough wallspace for graphic recording? Is there space for making presentations and displaying materials? Can the room be darkened easily if you are planning to show slides? Are there adequate electrical outlets? Is there adequate ventilation and temperature control?

■ **Provide Adequate Notification.** Send out notices about the meeting well in advance. If it is a meeting open to the general public, notices should be sent at least three weeks prior to the meeting date. Subsequent reminders sent the week prior to the meeting will help increase attendance. Notices and press releases should also be sent to local media contacts. If participants will be reviewing materials ahead of time, be sure the materials are sent out at least a week before the meeting.

■ **Organize Materials.** Get all of the materials organized for the meeting well ahead of time, including photocopies of handouts. If you will be holding a series of meetings, put together a materials checklist and supply box, including markers, nametags, pencils, scissors, masking tape, etc. If refreshments will be served, organize supplies such as napkins, cups, and plates as well.

■ **Arrive Early to Set Up.** Be sure to arrive at the meeting room well ahead of time to set up the room, meeting materials, and refreshments.

Conducting the Meeting

All group meetings should be properly facilitated and recorded. Meetings that are specifically related to Housing Element issues should be facilitated by someone with appropriate sensibilities to low-income and special needs groups. It is often helpful to have a trained facilitator serve this role at community meetings. This allows planning staff to focus on their role as resource persons to provide information, answer questions, and participate in the group discussion.

All meetings should begin and end on time. If more time is needed, the group may decide to extend the meeting time or to schedule a follow-up meeting. If some participants cannot stay for an extended meeting period, then a follow-up meeting should be scheduled.

The following roles are essential to a successful meeting. These may be played by a single individual if they are experienced and the meeting is small. Most often, however, separate individuals should play the roles.

■ **Facilitator.** The facilitator is responsible for keeping the group on schedule and making sure all of the items on the agenda are covered. She or he does not contribute opinions, but makes sure that all participants have an opportunity to speak. The facilitator should stand at the front of the room, be energetic and positive, and keep the dialog focused on the task at hand. The facilitator summarizes key points made by participants to ensure they have been properly recorded; asks follow up questions for clarification; and acknowledges areas of common concern, agreement or disagreement. The facilitator helps resolve process issues, enforces the group's rules of conduct, and makes sure that the commitment to finish the meeting on time is kept.

■ **Recorder.** The recorder is the group's note taker. This should be done on large sheets of paper (called a wallgraphic) or on flipcharts at the front of the room, providing a "group memory" of key points from the meeting discussions. The recorder should try to capture the key points from the discussion, using the participants' own words as much as possible. At the beginning of the meeting, the recorder (as well as the facilitator) should explain his or her role, and ask participants to check the recorder's work throughout the meeting to make sure their points have been recorded accurately.

Gilroy General Plan Vision Workshop   Baird+Driskell Community Planning

A seasoned recorder can provide a very valuable service by organizing comments by theme and illustrating connections between themes, thereby providing a tool for group decision making.

■ **Resource Person.** Other project staff can serve as resource people to answer technical questions about background information, analyses, and related issues. It is usually best to have this be a person separate from the facilitator and recorder, so that those individuals can concentrate on their meeting management tasks. Like the facilitator and recorder, resource persons should introduce themselves at the beginning of the meeting, explaining who they are, and the role they will serve during the meeting.

Following Up

Each meeting should close with a clear identification of next steps, including an explanation of how the meeting results will be summarized and made available, and how they will be subsequently used in the decision making process. Participants should be made aware of how they can obtain a copy of the meeting summary and how they can maintain their involvement in the participation process.

The meeting summary should provide a comprehensive summary of the meeting's process and results, including a transcript of the points recorded as part of the "group memory" during the meeting (filled out in more detail as necessary).

Building Consensus

The goal of the participation process is to build consensus among elected officials, staff, key stakeholders, and community residents. The stronger the consensus, the stronger the likelihood that political and popular support will be there for actual implementation.

However, consensus can only be reached if all of the participants commit themselves to trying to reach it. That does not mean that they must agree from the beginning that they will "compromise their values in order to reach agreement." It means that they see a value in reaching consensus, and will commit themselves to engaging in a consensus-building process.

To help build consensus, all participants should:

■ **Agree to Disagree.** Recognize from the beginning that disagreements will exist. The process does not seek to make everyone agree on everything. Rather, it seeks to find a common ground that everyone can live with and support, even if they don't agree with all of its components.

■ **Be Inclusive.** Participants must value and respect differences of opinion, recognizing the diversity of voices and perspectives in the community. Everyone must have the opportunity to make their voice heard and to contribute their ideas and opinions.

■ **Focus on Listening.** Consensus is built through dialog. That means that not only must everyone have an opportunity to have their say, but they must also commit themselves to listening to other people have their say too.

■ **Keep an Open Mind.** The participation process is a learning process. By listening to, valuing, and responding to the diversity of ideas, perspectives, and opinions in the community, we build a richer, more complex and more complete understanding of the issues and possible solutions. Everyone needs to be open to changing their opinions in response to what they learn.

■ **Don't Get Personal.** Keep the dialog focused on issues. Do not tolerate personal attacks or other digressions that create animosity and division. All participants must agree to treat each other with trust and respect.

■ **Think Critically.** Being critical does not mean being negative. It means recognizing both the strengths and weaknesses of past experiences, current opportunities, and new ideas, and then finding ways to apply the gained knowledge.

■ **Innovate.** Be willing to explore new ways of doing things. Consider successful initiatives from other communities, and how they might be tailored in response to local issues. Think "outside the box" and don't be afraid to be the first jurisdiction to try a new approach to an old (or new) problem.

■ **Think Long Term.** Develop long-term solutions, building a policy framework and institutional mechanisms for ongoing implementation and monitoring. Through the participation process, develop the relationships, communication channels, and new ways of working together that will be the foundation for ongoing community planning and problem-solving.

Consensus building is further supported through a participation process that:

■ **Begins with the Big Picture.** Many times, people who see themselves as being in opposition to each other actually agree with each other on a vast majority of issues. By beginning the process with the big picture, participants will realize that they share many common values and aspirations. Start with general questions and focus on areas of agreement before moving on to the details and areas of potential disagreement. What do we like about our community? What would we like to change? What would we like our community to be like in twenty years?

■ **Avoids Creating "Winners" and "Losers."** Don't create situations in which one side wins and the other, therefore, loses. Avoid taking yes/no votes to make decisions or lock-in outcomes. This may become necessary later in the process, but is definitely not necessary early in the process. Rather, take group "polls" in which participants can indicate their overall level of support or agreement with the issue or proposal under discussion, leaving open the option of changing their mind after further discussion. For example, participants can choose one of the following responses:

1.   I fully support the proposal as presented.

2.   I can live with the proposal as presented, but think it needs some modification.

3.   I think the proposal needs more discussion; I feel I need more information to make my decision.

4.   I am opposed to the proposal, with or without modification, and do not wish to discuss it further.

■ **Keeps Options Open.** Don't get locked into deciding between narrowly defined choices early in the process. Alternatives and policy proposals should not be presented as "either/or" choices. Rather, they should be presented as a basis for discussion, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each, and seeking to create a "hybrid" or modified alternative that reflects the group's priorities. Be open to making adjustments to agreements that were made early in the process in response to new information or further group discussion.

■ **Doesn't Get Bogged Down in Process.** Agree on the basic rules of group behavior and a general process framework in the first one or two meetings, and then focus on the issues. Don't let the process overshadow the important issues that need to be discussed.

■ **Fine Tune Between Meetings.** Debrief after each meeting and develop a strategy for moving forward in the next meeting. Identify any additional information that needs to be collected or analyzed; explore potential alternatives in response to group concerns; and develop a process for the next meeting that continues to move the group forward and keeps to the schedule.

■ **Documents Both Process and Results.** Be sure to keep a complete and accurate record of group discussions and agreements. Whenever a poll or vote is taken, record not only the tally of votes, but also the reasons why members voted the way they did. Always be sure to follow up meetings with a written summary of comments made at the meeting and its results.

PARTICIPATION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Following is a brief overview of a variety of tools and techniques that can be used to facilitate and enhance the participation process. While not comprehensive, it provides a starting point for developing a toolkit of methods to support a locally tailored participation program. Think critically about the groups you are trying to reach and how best to contact them and facilitate their participation. Involve representatives from key stakeholder groups in designing and implementing an effective information and participation strategy. Also, be sensitive to issues such as language by providing materials in multiple languages or translation services at public events if necessary to facilitate the communication process.

Public Information Tools

■ **Mailing Lists.** A project mailing list should be developed and maintained both for the duration of the project and as an ongoing tool for community outreach on housing issues. The mailing list can be developed starting with existing mailing lists from the local jurisdiction, community organizations, and key stakeholder groups and supplementing during the process with sign-in sheets from community workshops, study sessions, and public hearings. Using database or contact management software, a mailing list can be customized to support targeted mailings based on identified interests, geographic location, or type of contact (e.g., elected or appointed official, interest group, media contact, resident, developer, business owner). Mailing list information can also be merged with word-processed documents to send personalized letters of invitation to key events. Request e-mail addresses as part of the mailing list data, and ask participants if they would prefer to receive materials by regular post or e-mail.

■ **Newsletters.** Your jurisdiction may have an existing newsletter that can be used to distribute information on the project and its findings and to announce community participation and input opportunities. Alternatively, a project newsletter can be developed, establishing a project identity and potentially providing an ongoing vehicle for information on housing issues, strategies and achievements, and a tool for annual evaluations. Announcements and/or inserts sent to other community groups that distribute their own newsletter can also provide a vehicle for getting information out to the community.

■ **Press Releases.** Local media representatives (reporters, editors, etc.) should be identified and contacted early in the process so that they are aware of the project, purpose, and schedule. Add the media to the project mailing list, send regular project updates, and encourage them to attend key project meetings and community participation events. Regular press releases can help encourage coverage of upcoming project activities in the local newspaper, radio, or television. This will significantly increase the project's visibility and enhance community outreach efforts.

■ **Public Service Announcements.** Public service announcements (PSAs) are sometimes provided free of charge as a community service by commercial radio and television stations. Contact your local media representatives to announce your project or an important upcoming community meeting.

■ **Websites.** Websites are becoming an increasingly important vehicle for distributing information to the public as well as to committees and other agencies. Establish a highly visible presence for the project on the homepage of the local jurisdiction's website with links to key project documents (in downloadable format), a project schedule, and contact information. Interactive features such as comment forms or mailing list sign-up can also be included, as can links to other relevant websites (e.g., the website for HCD, nonprofit housing groups, etc.). Encourage community stakeholder groups with websites to link to the project website. Also include the project's web address on all printed materials.

■ **Informational Displays.** Project visibility and outreach can be significantly enhanced by informational displays at prominent locations in the community. A portable information display can be set up at places such as shopping centers, coffee shops, school events, and community centers to provide an overview of the project as well as an opportunity for feedback through a questionnaire or comment form.

■ **Fact Sheets.** Fact sheets are a useful tool for summarizing information on key issues in a format that is concise, easy to read, and tailored to local concerns. Ideally presented in two pages or less, a fact sheet provides a quick overview of the issue and a summary of the important data about it. The strategies and programs described in Section Three of *Blueprint 2001* are presented in a fact sheet format to facilitate their use in public workshops and strategy sessions.

■ **Presentations.** Presentations at project-organized workshops and meetings should be concise and properly prepared, with accompanying handouts and visuals to communicate key points and information. These and other presentations can also be made at the regular meetings of community groups (e.g., business groups, service clubs, church groups, and seniors groups). This can help get the word out about the project, counter myths and misperceptions about housing, communicate key findings and recommendations, encourage participation in project workshops and meetings, and foster a broad-based community dialog. Such presentations can be made by staff, elected or appointed officials, or by members of the project steering committee.

■ **Slide Shows and Videos.** These can be developed to accompany presentations, as part of an informational display, and/or as stand-alone information pieces available to community groups and on the project website. Groups such as the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California and the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) also have general videos available about affordable housing and related issues. *See Appendix D, Contacts and Resources.*

■ **Speaker Series.** It is sometimes helpful to have voices from outside the community incorporated as part of the information and participation program. Invited speakers from other cities or counties, non-profit and for-profit housing developers, and regional associations such as ABAG, Greenbelt Alliance, Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California, Bay Area Council, the California Affordable Housing Law Project, or the Nonprofit Housing Association. They can provide valuable information, regional perspectives, and new ideas that may be useful in local discussions. A speaker series can be incorporated into the participation program in a separate series of events or as part of the regular meetings of the project steering committee or community workshops. It can be organized as a series of events and speakers, or as a one-time event in which various speakers are present and a round-table discussion occurs.

Information Gathering Tools

■ **Interviews.** Interviews provide a structured approach for gathering information from a relatively small sample of individuals. They can be formal, making use of a structured or semi-structured interview instrument, or relatively informal and unstructured, in a conversation format. Interviews are typically conducted with a relatively small sample of key individuals or stakeholders, use open-ended questions, and are focused on having in-depth discussions on key issues through use of follow-up or "probing" questions.

■ **Questionnaires.** Both questionnaires and surveys are used to reach large numbers of people to get their input on key issues or ideas. Questionnaires can be useful early in the participation process to get input from a large number of people, develop a complete list of key issues and concerns, and raise community awareness about the project. Because surveys require considerable work to ensure a representative sample, they are best used later in the process, once it is possible to frame meaningful questions or present specific project proposals for consideration and feedback. Questionnaires can also be valuable later in the process, though they do not carry the same "statistical validity" as surveys in providing feedback on specific issues, ideas, or proposals.

Like an interview, a questionnaire uses a structured instrument through which respondents are asked for input on a pre-set list of questions. However, it typically uses close-ended questions (such as multiple choice, yes/no, scale rating, or short answer) and does not specifically support in-depth discussions or follow-up questions. Questionnaires are designed for use with larger samples with the ability to easily quantify responses (for example, 34% of the respondents said "x" while 66% said "y").

Questionnaires are usually completed by people on their own (and therefore sent by mail or distributed through other channels), with as many people as possible encouraged to respond. However, the questionnaire can also be an interview tool. While attention can be given to documenting the profile of respondents, there is little to no effort given to making sure that the profile matches that of the larger population or to ensuring a "random sample" of respondents. The intent is to get responses from as many people as possible.

■ **Surveys.** A survey is similar to a questionnaire in its use of a structured instrument, use of close-ended questions, ability to accommodate relatively large samples, and ability to easily quantify responses. The primary difference between a questionnaire and survey is in its sampling techniques, with an emphasis on achieving a randomly generated, representative sample. This means that the sample of people surveyed is representative of the larger population of interest, and that, therefore, it is "statistically valid" and it is possible to make generalizations based on its results.

■ **Comment Forms.** A comment form is similar to a short-form of questionnaire, but usually uses only open-ended questions to allow respondents to communicate their thoughts in as much detail as they like. Comment forms are usually used as part of a community workshop or meeting, or may be used in conjunction with an informational display, presentation, or speaker series. In a workshop setting, the questions on the comment form can be the same as the questions used for the group discussion, and participants can be given the comment forms to help organize their thoughts ahead of time. They can also be used to collect individual comments to supplement the group discussion comments if there is not enough time for all participants to share comments.

City of Napa Housing Element Update / Growth Management Strategy

TELL US!

We want to make sure that the Growth Management Strategy and updated Housing Element reflect diverse needs and priorities of our community. Please take a few moments to respond to the following questions.

You can give this comment sheet directly to a member of the Citizen Committee, drop it off at City Hall, or fold it, stamp it and mail it to the address shown on the back.

Please return your completed comment sheet by October 23!

Growth Management Issues and Opportunities
Growth management aims to protect the things we value about our community, ensuring that new development enhances rather than detracts from our quality of life.

What are the three things you like most about Napa today?

1.

2.

3.

What are the three things you are most concerned about as we plan for the future?

1.

2.

3.

Comment Card   Baird+Driskell Community Planning

Community Events

■ **Neighborhood or Community Workshops.** Apart from committee meetings and public hearings, workshops are the most common type of participation activity in a Housing Element process. Held at key points in the process, they provide an opportunity for members of the general public and invited stakeholders to review information, provide feedback, and engage in a dialog about Housing Element issues, ideas, and policy alternatives. The workshop's focus should be on receiving participants' input. At least half or more of the agenda should be dedicated to group discussion on various topics. If the focus is on presenting information rather than on group discussion about the information, then the event should be a presentation, not a workshop. Workshops should be scheduled in either a weekday evening or a Saturday. If possible, conduct a series of workshops (all of them using the same agenda) in multiple locations to maximize attendance. If a single workshop is held, it should be held in a large, central location. *See Planning and Holding Successful Meetings on page 2-10.*

■ **Town Meetings.** A town meeting is a large workshop hosted by the City Council or Board of Supervisors to focus attention on a topic of local importance. It may include presentations, but like a workshop, the emphasis should be on public input and dialog. It is an opportunity for elected and appointed officials to engage in a discussion with members of the public, using a much more interactive format than is typically possible in a formal public hearing or regular city council meeting. Town meetings are usually held in a large, central location on a weekday evening or a Saturday. Ideally, they should also be broadcast on a local cable channel.

> ## Workshop Kits
>
> Extend participation opportunities to many more people in a cost-effective manner by providing "workshop kits" to groups and individuals interested in holding a workshop with their neighbors, friends, or to members of a particular stakeholder group. The "kit" should contain the agenda, handouts, and comment sheets from the main workshop, as well as any presentation materials. A brief "facilitator's guide" can provide an introduction and overview, supplemented by a facilitator's training session to introduce the kit and workshop activities to interested people. This approach has been used successfully in many communities to extend the participation program's outreach to hundreds of more people than might otherwise be reached.
>
> In some communities, members of the project steering committee used workshop kits to conduct extensive community outreach. The workshop results, compiled by the facilitators in a standard format, can then be summarized and presented in a document for committee members and decision makers. The sign-in sheets from each workshop can also be used to expand the project mailing list.

■ **Tours.** Discussions about local housing issues can be considerably enhanced by taking participants on a tour of local housing developments. This helps to ground their discussions in reality and provides a common set of reference points. A tour can be useful at the beginning of the process to help introduce committee members to various concepts and developments (e.g., looking at different housing types, different designs and densities, recent developments, special needs housing). It can also be used to engage the group in a visioning exercise, looking at areas in the community and housing developments that they view as positive and successful, and identifying areas in the community or housing developments they would like to see improved.

Later in the process, a housing tour can be used to provide information in response to particular areas of concern. For example, a tour of SROs in the local area and nearby communities, or a tour and evaluation of housing opportunity sites may provide additional understanding.

- **Design Charrettes.** This is a type of interactive community workshop where the emphasis is on a specific site or local area and on the physical design constraints and opportunities. To be successful, it needs to involve design professionals (architects, landscape architects, urban designers) who can translate community input into design sketches and ideas. Participants can also get involved through manipulation of a project model and kit of parts, or by making sketches of their own. The charrette should be a very hands-on, interactive activity. If successful, it will result in an agreed upon design approach for the site or area, articulated as a general set of design principles, if not an actual draft sketch or model.

  Because it is site or area-specific, the use of a design charrette may be limited in the scope of a Housing Element process (which is typically policy-focused and area-wide in scope). However, it may be a useful method for reaching group consensus on the potential opportunities and policy direction for a problematic locale such as the potential for introducing housing in an existing commercial area or increasing densities on key infill properties.

- **Open Houses.** An open house provides an opportunity to present information to the public in a more interactive format than an informational display (though informational displays may be included), and a less formal format than a presentation or workshop. Residents and other stakeholders are invited to "drop in" during a certain time period on a weekday evening or Saturday, to get more information about local housing issues and to give their input as part of the Housing Element process. The open house can be set up as a series of information displays, or stations, with project steering committee members, elected and appointed officials, and/or staff and consultants available to answer questions and engage in discussions with participants.

  Comment forms or large-format interactive displays (e.g., place dots on the map to indicate possible locations for mixed-use development) can be used to collect input, and mini-workshops or a speaker series can be held in conjunction with the open house to provide opportunities for group discussion. An open house can also be held prior to a town meeting or community workshop, where the open house begins one hour prior to the workshop start time; or can be held as part of a larger community event, such as a series of "booths" at a popular community festival in the park. The idea is to reach as many people as possible, especially those who might not typically get involved.

- **Study Sessions.** A study session can be used at key points in the process to engage decision makers (both elected and appointed officials) in a discussion about key issues and recommendations. Study sessions are particularly useful just before the public hearings to provide a less formal environment for reviewing and discussing the Preliminary Draft or Draft Housing Element. It is an opportunity for decision makers to ask questions and to discuss possible changes to the document, and to involve the public and other stakeholders.

  Study sessions should be treated like any public meeting, with appropriate noticing and an agenda for the discussion. Members of the public should have an opportunity to present their concerns and opinions, but the focus of the session should be on the input and discussion of the relevant decision makers. Study sessions can include both councilmembers/supervisors and planning commissioners to facilitate their sharing of ideas and opinions.

- **Public Hearings.** The final public participation opportunities in the Housing Element process are the public hearings that must be held before the Planning Commission and/or City Council or Board of Supervisors to review and approve the Draft Housing Element. Public hearings must follow a specified f format, with members of the public given an opportunity to present both oral and/or written comments on the draft element. Final adoption of the Housing Element is by the City Council and/or Board of Supervisors.

Focused Outreach Activities

■ **Focus Groups.** A focus group involves a select group of individuals in a facilitated discussion about a specific topic or set of topics. Unlike a community workshop in which participation is open to all, a focus group is by invitation only to explore the perspectives of a particular group. Drawing upon the techniques used in market research, participants are selected because they share similar characteristics (e.g., housing developers, or people with special housing needs) or represent a range of perspectives or interests (e.g., from different neighborhood groups, local businesses, environmental groups, etc.).

The focus group session provides an opportunity to gather personal knowledge, attitudes and/or feelings about the topic(s) at hand. Participants are encouraged to express their views and feelings about the issue or topic in their own words, exploring the issue in some depth and, at times, responding to the input given by other participants. A focus group is a data collection tool, not a consensus-building tool. Focus groups typically meet once only, though it is possible that they could meet consecutively over a period of time to explore an issue or sequence of issues in-depth.

■ **Special Needs Groups.** Special workshops, focus groups or meetings may be held with people who have special housing needs to ensure that their interests and perspectives are represented in the process. Due consideration should be given to the time and location of such meetings, noticing, provision of childcare (especially for working parents or single parent households), transportation to and from the meeting, and multi-lingual needs. It may be best to hold the meeting in a special location, such as a senior center, emergency shelter, or transitional housing facility.

■ **Youth Outreach and Participation.** Young people can bring energy, ideas and new perspectives to the planning process. Because they represent future housing needs and will be significantly affected by current housing decisions, they should have an opportunity to be involved in the Housing Element process. Notices of meetings and other project mailings should be sent to schools, youth groups, and student representatives. Youth participation should be encouraged at all of the community events and youth representatives should also be included in the project steering committee. Special youth-focused workshops can also be held to facilitate youth involvement, and local teachers may want to incorporate information on the Housing Element and participation activities into a course curriculum.

Moraga Festival Display   Baird+Driskell Community Planning